

# The Cross-Border Case for SoccerCity

VOICE OF SAN DIEGO

By Lawrence A. Herzog | May 10, 2017

As local experts, pundits and writers have publicly debated the [SoccerCity proposal](#) for the Qualcomm site in Mission Valley over the last few months, a cultural battle is looming in the background.

## COMMENTARY

The Voices of San Diego

Union-Tribune sports columnist Nick Canepa epitomizes one side of this battle. Canepa's [anti-soccer rants](#) crystallize a larger, negative spin about SoccerCity that many locals have embraced. His [March 26 column](#) lamenting the loss of the Chargers lashed out at San Diegans now "content to read books like 'Soccer for Dummies.'" Canepa, a football guru, makes no secret about his scorn for all things soccer, claiming, for example, that Soccer City is "another community blunder waiting to happen," since "we need another 30,000-seat stadium ... like we need an ocean."

Meanwhile, a phalanx of urban planners, designers and public policy experts has joined the chorus of SoccerCity critics. Former Center City Development Corporation chair Kim Kilkenny has argued for [transparency and clarity over the many questions](#) about the SoccerCity proposal.

City planning commissioner Theresa Quiroz opined that [there are some "troubling issues hidden in the fine print of the SoccerCity Plan."](#)

Fair enough, but where were these prudent voices a year ago when a deeply flawed urban development plan called the Downtown Stadium Initiative, the plan for the Chargers' convadium, was rushed onto the ballot box in the eleventh hour, making all sorts of dubious claims about being tied to downtown renovation and to the well-being of the East Village community? If ever a plan raised questions about land use, environmental impact or the use of public monies by a private entity, the Chargers' Measure C was it.

Is there a cultural bias here? Would critics be parsing every minute detail or dissenting as loudly if the FS Investors' SoccerCity plan were called Football City? I wonder.

Too many experts are missing the cross-border argument for SoccerCity.

Mission Valley sits just 16 miles from the Mexican border, the gateway to Latin America, where soccer is the most popular sport among 600 million inhabitants. Mexico is our third largest trade partner, to the tune of \$500 billion.

We live in a globally connected world. What better way for San Diego to stake out its identity as a multicultural city-of-the-future than to build one of the region's most innovative and largest urban development projects with a nod toward Mexico's 5 million soccer fans in northern Baja, who – oh, by the way – live within a two-hour drive of Mission Valley?

Yes, SoccerCity must be carefully vetted, and the details of the development plan judiciously scrutinized. If those details lead officials to reject the plan, so be it. But let's be clear on what we are actually criticizing. San Diegans need to tamp down on the apparent cultural bias against fútbol.

Tied to the expansion of San Diego State University, this mixed-use project could be an exciting regional destination, a pedestrian-scale urban village with widely spaced *paseos*, shops, offices, condos, apartments, vibrant Mexican-flavored *mercados*, outdoor corner bars, open *plazas*, roaming flower and taco *ambulantes* and cries of “*Gol!*” at the nearby

fútbol stadium. SoccerCity should look and feel more like Mexico City and less like Kansas City.

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